5 Ways to Save Time and Money on Your Data Backups – and Impress Your Boss Too

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Introduction

When it comes to IT professionals, one universal truth always seems to be present: You have way more work than you have time. When you're managing the backup and recovery of dozens of servers and virtual machines, often across multiple physical locations, it's a safe bet that you barely have time to take lunch each day, much less get home on time.

Not to worry. This short e-book will highlight five key approaches that can not only help you save time managing backups, but control costs too. Together, these best practices will not only give you more time to focus on your other key priorities, they may end up impressing your boss the next time annual reviews come around.

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5 Ways to Save Time and Money on Your Data Backups

1. Determine your true SLAs.

If you find yourself running short on time it could be due to treating all of your data or applications with the same degree of criticality. Talk to your application owners, leaders, your business counterparts, those around you who can help prioritize what your business needs to survive and thrive.

Understand which applications require the fastest SLAs, which ones your internal customers can go a little longer without, and which ones they can go a lot longer without. Then recommend a plan that protects those applications and their data appropriately. (Note: You might have to be a bit ruthless to get to your true SLAs.)

Not only will you save time by executing on a plan like this, but you'll help your company save money by not over-paying to protect non-critical data. And finding ways to save money always makes you look good to your boss.

Questions to ask yourself

1. Do you know what data you're protecting? Or do you tend to have a blanket policy to protect everything?

2. Which of the data/applications that you're protecting require an RPO and RTO of seconds to minutes? Or less than 60 minutes?

3. Which of the data/applications that you're protecting require an RPO and RTO of hours or days?

The answers to these questions will help you to start thinking about a plan based on which data and applications require the fastest SLAs and prevent you from needlessly treating all of your data as equal.

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2. Simplify your deployment and management.

Do you spend too much time just getting your backup and recovery up and running? Purpose-built backup appliances (PBBAs) can be a time-saving option where appropriate.

Appliances offer a turnkey, simplified approach to optimize your backup and recovery environment. And they can be non-disruptively integrated into your infrastructure without having to change any of your processes, applications or recovery point and time objectives.

You can save time with little or no operational changes and money by providing deduplication to close backup windows more efficiently and make recovery a snap. Then use that time you saved to do the server provisioning that's been hanging over your head.

Analyst perspective

"Organizations of all sizes are interested in utilizing their data protection infrastructures via appliance form factors — thanks in large part to such appliances' ease of acquisition, ease of deployment, right-sizing, and the assurance of having complementary hardware and software in a solution that is going to work better than the sum of its parts."

ESG Solution Showcase
Date: March 2015
Authors: Jason Buffington, Senior Analyst; and Monya Keane, Research Analyst

South Dakota Housing Authority Case Study

"We no longer have backups taking all night and running into the morning. Incremental backups take just under four hours, and full backups complete in about eight hours with [a purpose-built backup appliance]."

Travis Duffy, Network Administrator, South Dakota Housing Authority
Case study: South Dakota Housing Authority
Date: February 2014

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3. Research your licensing options.

You could be wasting time tracking your complex licensing requirements. Don't feel you have to go with one product that protects your mission critical applications and as a result over-protects your less critical data. It's simply not necessary to incur any additional expenses or add another level of inflexibility. There are much more versatile options available.

You'll want to know how much data you want to protect—is it 10 TB or 300 PB? If you're unsure, there are tools to help you figure that out. And then you'll want to decide whether licensing by the front-end terabyte or the back-end terabyte is right for your business.

Once you determine your data growth, particularly for applications such as email, then it will be easier to cost-effectively deploy the capacity that is needed. And not only will this save your company money (again, making you look good) but you'll be surprised how much of your time is freed up when you use the right product to do the job.

Storage Switzerland and the service level objective

A key to managing multiple data protection applications is to create a strategy focused on what Storage Switzerland calls a "service level objective" (SLO). When following this strategy each application or environment is assessed for its data protection needs. The result is a clear understanding of what IT can deliver in terms of protection frequency, recovery times and data retention. There is also a clear understanding of what IT cannot deliver with the current data protection assets. Application- or environment-specific applications are used to fill this gap.

Enabling Service Level Data Protection
Author: Storage Switzerland

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4. Leverage technologies that can save you time.

Is expansive data growth eating up your time? Some technologies can save you time as well as money.

For example, if you're dealing with more and more data every day (and chances are you are), then you can reduce the amount of data that you need to store with compression and deduplication technology. This helps curb the data growth. And, when you are evaluating a new storage technology or protection and recovery solution you have to carefully consider how much time, effort and additional staff time it will take to deploy.

Data protection and recovery technologies that can be easily and non-disruptively integrated in to existing infrastructure and processes typically save time and you might even have your entire weekend to yourself.

Allergy Partners gets 6x the data storage at less cost while saving 20 hours of IT time a week.

Medical professionals need patient records to be accessible 24/7, and backups must be retained in compliance with industry regulations. Therefore, as medical organizations transition from paper to electronic medical records, they need reliable backup and recovery — and the solution also needs to be cost-effective.

Allergy Partners, the nation's largest single specialty medical practice in allergy, asthma and immunology knew that to continue delivering high-quality care for its patients, its costly and time-consuming tape backup system had to go. The system could no longer back up all the organization's data even though it cost $90,000 annually, and the company could not afford having senior IT staff spending up to 20 hours a week manually executing, rotating and moving backup tapes.

By replacing its antiquated tape-based system with a purpose-built backup appliance, Allergy Partners can now perform complete, fast and reliable backups — at a fraction of the cost of other solutions. The organization is able to back up all its data, retain it for the required 10 days, replicate it nightly and deduplicate it frequently — at a savings the company calls "astronomical." Plus, the IT team saves as much as 20 hours per week.

Case study: Allergy Partners
Date: December 2013

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5. Don't forget about scalability.

This piece of advice could save you time in the long run. You probably struggle with the best way to protect and archive across your physical, virtual, and cloud environments. You'll want to be sure to consider the scalability of your solution with regard to those infrastructures.

It is becoming clear that cloud provides the conduit for both your physical and virtual applications and data. Not all protection and recovery solutions effectively manage scale and protect data and applications outside of your datacenter. And many cloud solutions only offer storage and protection inside their own cloud infrastructure.

This creates a proprietary and potentially high-cost model to support long-term. Not to mention, inflexibility and vendor lock-in. All very important considerations when evaluating a new data protection and recovery solution.

Three rules of thumb for evaluating the scalability of your data protection

1. Obvious but worth stating: your protection solution should be poised to handle your business' projected growth. Does it have the scalability to grow with you?

2. You'll want to efficiently move data between local environments and public and private clouds, providing high availability and failover capabilities while optimizing bandwidth via compression and deduplication.

3. You'll want to keep in mind that data protection is only one piece of a much larger puzzle. Take into consideration whether your infrastructure would enable technologies into the future and not be tied to legacy systems.

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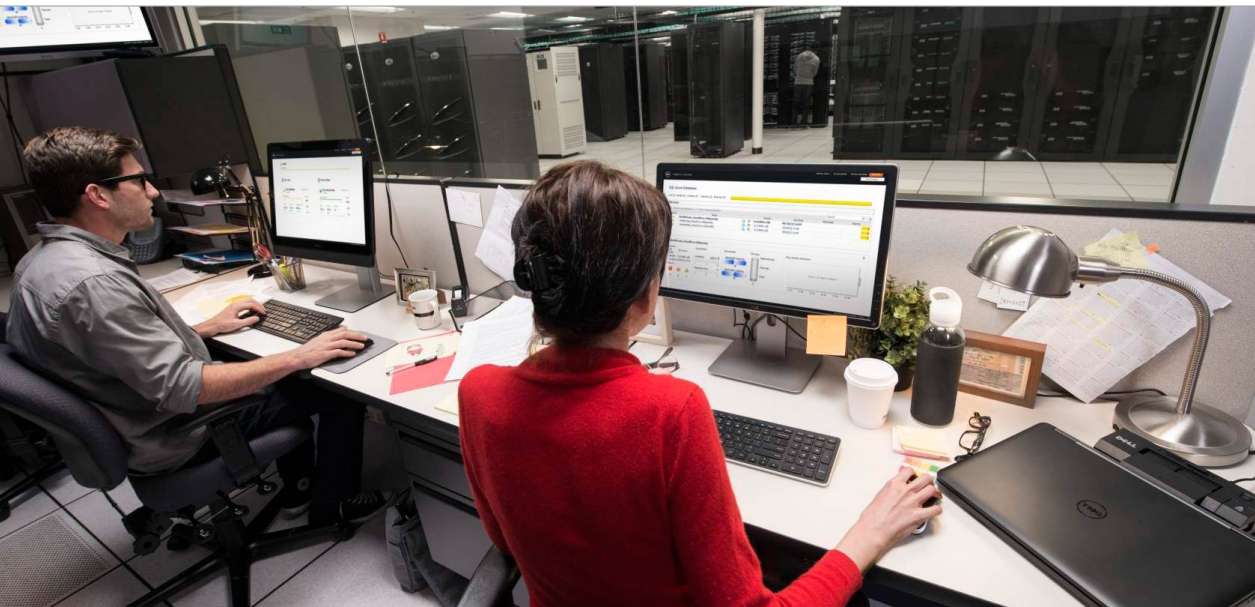
Conclusion

Put together, the five best practices outlined here won't solve all your work-related challenges. But they will certainly help chip away at one of your biggest ones: Lack of time. So whether you implement one of them, or all of them, get ready to get a little more time back in your day to tackle your other work priorities, or get home in time on Friday to kick start your weekend.

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Dell Software
5 Polaris Way
Aliso Viejo, CA 92656
www.Dell.com
Refer to our Web site for regional and international office information.